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ABSTRACT

As Texas public schools undertake their third year of implementing site-based decision making (SBDM), it becomes increasingly important to examine the extent to which SBDM has achieved its purported goals. This paper examined how Texas public school districts might effect mandated governance changes through the political phenomenon known as site-based decision making, and examined the influence these governance changes might have on public participation in educational policy decisions. It also examined citizen demands related to policies enacted. The Delphi method was used with two panels of experts composed of: (1) board presidents, superintendents, and principals; and (2) parents and community/business members. Three rounds were conducted with each panel. A total of 66 people participated in the first round, 55 of the original panel in the second round, and 50 of the original panel in the third round. Questionnaires sent to 284 executive committee members of professional organizations yielded 215 responses, a 76 percent response rate. Participants perceived that SBDM offered increased opportunities for citizen participation at the school site; however, they saw conflict as inevitable. In particular, the domains of goal setting, staffing, and school organization will offer constituents the greatest opportunity for influencing education policy. They also regarded SBDM as a vehicle for articulating demands to policymakers, which would increase congruence between citizen demands and policy, thus creating greater democratization of the policy-formation process and reducing citizen dissatisfaction in general. It is recommended that school districts, board members, and administrators: (1) develop leadership, communication, problem-solving, conflict resolution, goal-setting, and consensus-building skills; (2) expand their knowledge and expertise in the politics of education and participative decision making; (3) involve SBDM committees in the budgeting and curriculum-development process; (4) establish a community-relations program; and (5) analyze their own board-superintendent culture and decision-making behavior. (LMI)

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THE

POLITICAL EFFECTS OF SITE-BASED DECISION MAKING ON LOCAL SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN THE STATE OF TEXAS

A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE

TASB/TASA JOINT ANNUAL CONVENTION

DALLAS, TEXAS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1984) have consistently pointed out that reform in education requires change to take place at the ***local community level***. Neither excellence nor improvement can be applied or mandated from the outside as both must be developed within a school community (Lieberman & Miller, 1986). Externally imposed practices that are incompatible with local routines, traditions, or resources are likely to be rejected in time (McLaughlin, 1987). Since virtually all of the school reform initiatives have originated in the state house, educational and legislative policy makers are faced with the challenge of constructively redressing this imbalance.

The challenge for redesigning the educational system is to achieve significant changes not only in the way local school districts relate to schools and the community, but also in the way states relate to both districts and schools (Elmore, 1988). The distribution of state and local authority, according to Timar and Kirp (1987), should be ***a cooperative effort aimed at enhancing institutional effectiveness***. The structure and process of governance and control at the state and district levels needs to be adjusted in order to accommodate and support needed changes in the organization and management of instruction in schools and classrooms, as well as in promoting more effective school/community relations (Cohen, 1987).

Site-based decision making strategies, appropriately tailored to the circumstances of each state and local school district, hold the potential for resolving the tensions that currently exist between state-level policymakers and local school personnel (Guthrie, 1986). Site-based decision making formally alters school governance arrangements by increasing the authority of an array of actors at the school site. Decision making authority is redistributed for the purpose of stimulating and sustaining improvements in the individual school, resulting in an increase in authority of school personnel, parents, and community members at the school site (Malen, Ogawa & Kranz, 1989). When decisions are decentralized to the school site, school personnel, parents, and community members theoretically have a means of controlling and connecting overall school operations in order to meet the ultimate goal - ***improved student academic achievement***.

The idea of site-based decision making and community control of public schools is not a new concept (Lutz & Merz, 1992). In fact, Lutz and Merz reported, such concern and involvement dates back to the colonial schools of America, and has been consistently seen throughout the three centuries of school in America (p. 146). Similarly, Osborne and Gaebler (1992) stated, empowerment is an American tradition, as old as the frontier. In their book, *Reinventing Government: How the Entreprenurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, Osborne and Gaebler stated: "We are a nation of self-help organizers. We create our own day-care centers, our own baby-sitting cooperatives, our own Little Leagues, our own Girl Scout and Boy Scout Troops, our own recycling programs, our own volunteer organizations of all kinds. And yet, when we organize our public business, we forget these lessons. We let bureaucrats control our public services, not those they intend to help. We rely on professionals to solve problems, not families and communities" (p. 51).

In a more contemporary context, numerous efforts to implement site-based decision making along with elements of community control have been initiated over the past three decades: New York City in the early 1960s, Chicago in 1989, and state-mandated site-based decision making initiatives in Florida, California, Minnesota, Kentucky, and Tennessee in the late-1980s and early-1990s (Valesky, Smith & Fitzgerald, 1990). Not to be left behind in what Lutz and Merz (1992) describe as the "race to reform," the 71st Texas Legislature passed legislation (House Bill 2885) in May, 1991 which required each of the 1,048 school districts in the state to develop and implement a plan for site-based decision making by September 1, 1992.

As Texas public schools undertake their third year of implementing site-based decision making, it becomes increasingly important to examine the extent to which site-based decision making has achieved its purported goal.

Authentic site-based decision making involves parents and community members' participation in decisions which affect real school outputs and therefore, should result in less citizens' dissatisfaction with their schools. The underlined words represent the key concepts in the three dominant theories of how democracy operates, or fails to operate, in local school governance: the Continuous Participation Theory (Zeigler & Jennings, 1974); the Input-Output Systems Theory (Wirt & Kirst, 1982); and the Dissatisfaction Theory (Lutz & Iannoccone, 1978). Thus, the question of whether or not site-based decision making, according to the three theoretical explanations of local school governance, will make the local governance of Texas public schools more democratic, becomes very important.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem addressed in this research is the **politics of site-based decision making** in Texas public school districts. The research undertaken examined how Texas public school districts might effect mandated governance changes through the political phenomenon known as site-based decision making, and examined the influence these governance changes might have on public participation in educational policy decisions. It also examined citizen demands related to policies enacted, as well as the level of parental, and community/business member participation in and satisfaction with their local school district policymaking. The three basic research questions posed to address the problem in the study were:

1. Will site-based decision making produce more citizen participation in the process of local school governance?
2. Will citizen demands produce more responsive policies and programs due to site-based decision making?
3. Will citizen dissatisfaction with public education be reduced due to site-based decision making?

In relation to the three basic research questions, nine sub-questions were also addressed:

1. Will more people participate in the process of local school governance?
2. Will people participate more often in the process of local school governance?
3. Will people participate in more important decisions?
4. Will people vote more often in school elections?
5. Will citizens perceive that their specific demands are being met?
6. Will an objective analysis of demands versus actual policies and programs enacted suggest greater political responsiveness?
7. Will the percentage of voter turnout in school elections change?
8. Will incumbent school board member defeat decrease?
9. Will superintendent turnover decrease?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The major objective of this study was to fulfill a need to determine the potential impact of site-based decision making on local school governance in the State of Texas. One area which has largely been

ignored both in legislation and the extant literature is the political effect of site-based decision making on local school governance.

The restructuring movement is, in itself, a political change strategy. Such strategies have to do with setting policy. They always involve the assumption and use of authority and power, and almost inevitably lead to ***political activity of citizens***. The theories presented in the study suggest that the answers to the research questions must generally be answered in the affirmative if site-based decision making is to have more than a superficial effect.

The study was undertaken to provide some empirical evidence to answer the three major research questions, as well as the nine sub-questions they posed. Such answers suggest a response to the larger question, "Will site-based decision making contribute to citizens' experience in effective democratic action, and thus their confidence in the process of American democracy?" No other question should be of greater concern when considering the nature of American public education. No other question should be more important in the minds of school board members, school administrators, and laypersons interested in the future of American public education.

SITE-BASED DECISION MAKING: CRITICAL ASPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Duttweiler and Muchler (1990) stated that as a prominent feature of many school restructuring efforts, decentralizing decision making and resource allocation to the school site is similar to unit-based management in the private sector, "a strategy that has become increasingly popular in the past ten years" (p. 29). Lindquist and Mauriel (1989) reported that many of the educational reforms being proposed include a recommendation that school districts adopt some form of site-based decision making, and allow more decisions affecting the individual school site to be made by people who are closely involved in the operations of the school.

According to Lindquist and Mauriel (1989), the fundamental feature of site-based decision making is ***delegation***. Site-based decision making is defined as a decentralized organizational structure in which the power and decisions formerly made by the superintendent and school board are delegated to the teachers, principal, parents, community members, and students of the local school (Marburger, 1985). An additional prominent feature of site-based decision making is the ***site council***. Marburger (1985) stresses the importance of such a group to act as the natural mechanism for the implementation of site-based decision making. The council model explicitly acts on the assumption that the school will benefit from enabling or empowering site participants to exert influence on school policy decisions (Malen, et al., 1989). Lindquist and Mauriel (1989) stated that the central concept behind the site or advisory council is to delegate decision making responsibility regarding management of the school to a broad cross-section of constituents, or stakeholders.

Another recurring feature of site-based decision making is the ***advocacy source*** for decentralization efforts. According to Marburger (1985), without the commitment of the superintendent, the process might simply be described as shared decision making with key actors providing input but final approval of decisions being subject to the superintendent's approval. That authority is in fact delegated from the school board to central administration to the school site to the advisory council is an assumption embedded in the theory of site-based decision making, according to Lindquist and Mauriel (1989). However, they also noted that "it is not at all clear that a school board will want to delegate its decision making authority to the

extent required by site-based decision making theory" (Lindquist & Mauriel, 19899, p. 405). In Texas this caveat was addressed directly in the provisions of House Bill 2885 which prohibited the commissioner of education from approving any plan which limits or affects the ***power or responsibility*** of the board of trustees of the school district to govern and manage the school district, as well as a provision, or prohibition, against a new cause of action or collective bargaining. So the expected outcomes of site-based decision making in Texas were not explicitly part of the legislation itself, but implicitly left to administrative interpretation and specifically limited.

Fundamental to the concept of site-based decision making is the ***restructuring of roles*** within the school district among all individuals involved: superintendents, principals, teachers, students, parents and community members. Shifting roles are typically accompanied by ***shifts in power***, i.e. authority and influence. According to Duttweiler and Muchler (1990), a school that intends to fully implement site-based decision making must first ask two essential questions regarding authority: "What authority is delegated to the site?" and "How is authority distributed among site participants?" The answers to these questions they contend, will determine whether the site successfully implements the strategy and whether the community's students and adults benefit from the promises of site-based decision making.

An integral component of the site-based decision making process is the increased decision making authority of individuals at the school site. Calls for teacher participation have apparently created much tension between teachers and administrators in reassessing their respective roles (Giesert, 1988; Lieberman, 1988). This tension has been partly due to a failure on the part of reform proponents to distinguish between two critical dimensions of power in decision making: authority and influence (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). ***Authority*** deals with the ability of an organizational member to say "yes" or "no" to a particular decision (Conley, 1989). The other dimension of power in decision making is influence. Conley (1989) defined ***influence*** as "the capacity to shape decisions through informal or nonauthoritative means." Bacharach and Lawler (1980) identified three primary sources of power for influence: 1) personal characteristics - charisma, verbal skill, leadership qualities; 2) expertise - knowledge, skill, access to information; and 3) opportunity - informal aspects of formal or informal positions, i.e. "being in the right place at the right time."

While authority is normally distributed equally across members who occupy a given position, influence may be distributed unequally (Conley, 1989). While all teachers have equal degrees of formal authority based on their students, some will have greater degrees of influence due to their knowledge of subject matter, and thus will exert a greater degree of influence in the decision making process. The issue of authority and influence is central to the implementation of site-based decision making and participatory decision making. While ***authority is unidirectional*** flowing from the top down, ***influence is multidirectional*** (Conley, 1989). Authority normally has its basis in state-level statutory enactments or through local board and administrative policy. Influence, by contrast, may be exerted at any level, in any direction. In relation to the implicit bottom-up planning of site-based decision making, ***influence appears to be the central construct in efforts to initiate "bottom-up" participation*** (Cooper, 1989).

The sharing of authority and influence in site-based decision making is an issue which has generated significant levels of concern, particularly among teachers and administrators. Participation may be viewed as a device designed, at best, to gain teacher acceptance of decisions already made by management and, at worst, to circumvent teacher's unions (Conley, 1989). On the other hand, teachers and their representatives clearly view participation proposals as potential vehicles for gaining greater professional control over their occupation (Futrell, 1988). Some administrators fear that calls for teacher participation in decision making will erode traditional realms of administrative authority, such as decisions to recommend

teacher dismissal (Giesert, 1988). The resistance of school administrators to sharing their authority may be a major factor in limiting opportunities for teachers to exercise expertise and initiative in site-based decision making. The challenge inherent in site-based decision making is to develop methods whereby each group would have more ***influence*** on the others' decision. Such a perspective suggests that schools can best be viewed as "negotiated orders" where both ***authority*** and, more often, ***influence*** are being constantly negotiated and renegotiated (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987; Corwin, 1981; Hansen, 1981). Such a perspective thus implies that teachers and administrators should search for ways to "renegotiate the terms of their zones of influence, giving each more of a voice in decisions previously left to the other" (Shedd, 1988).

The role of the superintendent also changes significantly under site-based decision making. A condition for the effective implementation of participatory decision making is that it must be modeled and practiced at all levels, not just at the building level (Wood, 1984). Because the superintendent is frequently instrumental in introducing site-based decision making to a district, the manner in which he or she chooses to do this may influence both the organizational structure and the attitudes of the school community toward the concept (Clune & White, 1988). Glaser and Van Eynde (1989) suggest that the ***modeling of participatory management*** from the top down is often the most productive approach and the one most likely to result in lasting change to the culture of the organization.

The roles of central office staff also change from those of decision makers to support personnel (Harrison, Killion & Mitchell, 1989). This requires a ***great tolerance for ambiguity*** on the part of those accustomed to making decisions and a willingness to share the process with the broader community (Candoli, 1989). The central staff must accept their new role by understanding the importance of the ***support nature*** of their functions. The central staff must learn to perform in the changed environment of a site-based decision making focus by learning to become the support system for the individual campuses (Candoli, 1989).

According to Mitchell (1990), site-based decision making cannot work without the school board's active involvement and determined support. The potential for conflict arises when ***role ambiguity*** exists between the school board and the advisory council. In some cases, the site-based decision making council acts as a quasi-school board with the capacity to respond more rapidly to the needs and issues of the individual school. However, the Clune and White study (1988) reported that overall, respondents did not feel that site-based decision making councils presented a threat to school board authority, but instead felt that, through the councils, the school board has developed a new openness to listening to the needs of individual schools.

House Bill 2885 (Texas Education Code 21.931), passed in May of 1991, called for the establishment of school committees that would have responsibilities outlined in the district's plan for site-based decision making regarding decision making related to goal setting, curriculum, budgeting, staffing patterns, and school organization. While the law did not specifically state that the school committees were the same campus committees required under Senate Bill 1, Commissioner Lionel Meno, acting upon the recommendation of the State Advisory Committee for Site-Based Decision Making, interpreted that Senate Bill 1 elected committee is the same body that will be responsible for the site-based decision making role ("Site-Based Decision Making Working Document," 1992). Site-based decision making committees in Texas are assured by law, a two-thirds majority representation of teaching personnel, with one-third of the remaining committee members being a composite of nonteaching professional staff. While there is no legally defined ratio of parent, community, and business membership as compared to campus staff, the researchers question the existence of any committee in the state with laypersons in the majority.

Guthrie (1986) stated that if a school committee included both parents and teachers, the two groups should be represented equally, but total committee membership should not exceed twelve, "since the awkward social dynamics of larger groups often poses problems" (p. 307). These committee members would then be elected for two- or three-year overlapping terms to provide continuity. According to Beaubier and Thayer (1973), the basic rationale behind the site-based decision making council, or school committee, is to provide a method to improve communication and understanding between the school and community. Carr (1988) and Guthrie (1986) both view the function of school committees as being advisory in nature, with an important role in planning and evaluation, but with no authority to implement recommendations. "To make the role of the committees more than advisory," Guthrie stated, "would violate principals' professional accountability" (1986, p. 307).

Proponents of site-based decision making claim that the aims of ***accountability*** are better served through site-based decision making (Clune & White, 1988). Pierce (1976) states that site-based decision making provides a mechanism for making professional educators more accountable for their performance. The accountability system Guthrie (1986) and others suggest, is for a state to have a series of criterion referenced tests aligned with minimum performance goals established for its students. What Guthrie described as a system of accountability for results under site-based decision making was formally adopted by the Texas State Board of Education with the adoption in November, 1990, of the Academic Excellence Indicator System. The indicators, together with the statewide Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), encompass virtually all of Guthrie's recommendations.

In its June 1, 1992, "Site-Based Decision Making Working Document," the Commissioner's Statewide Advisory Committee responded to the question, "How do you foresee the responsibilities or functions of teachers changing as site-based decision making is implemented?" in the following manner: "Teachers' roles - as well as the roles of all others - will expand to share expertise and accountability" (p. 3). Thus, the ***concept of shared accountability*** as a result of site-based decision making was operationalized in Texas through administrative interpretation of legislation. However, the implications of site-based decision making for statewide accountability are even greater under the revised accreditation process which was implemented in the spring of 1992.

The accountability issue received intense focus from groups other than Texas Education Agency. The Texas Business and Education Coalition reported in "Site-Based Decision Making: A Means to Improved Student Performance" (1992) that: "Accountability at the local level is directly assigned to the community for support of academic standards, to the principal for making local decision making work, and to the professionals at the campus for competent input into the instructional program and the achievement of desired student performance outcomes. In some ways, site-based decision making could be viewed as a high-risk process for people at the campus level because it removes much of the possibility of shifting responsibility for performance shortfalls to district administrators, state agency personnel or lawmakers" (p. 3). In this same document, the Texas Business and Education Coalition identifies six fundamentals of site-based decision making, five of which reference various aspects of accountability.

Tye (1992) offered a somewhat different perspective on the accountability issue. Tye believes that in a restructured educational system, <u>everyone</u> will be accountable, from the local level to the statehouse, even those politicians who make claims of leadership but do not deliver moral and financial resources.

Duttweiler and Muchler (1990) identified five major personal and interpersonal barriers to change that districts implementing site-based decision making should be prepared to encounter: 1) resistance to

changing roles and responsibilities; 2) fear of losing power; 3) lack of skills; 4) lack of trust; and 5) fear of taking risks. Clune and White (1988) reported that not all teachers in their survey wanted increased decision making authority, and that some preferred a more centralized direction, and that some central office administrators and superintendents, reluctant to share power, may oppose site-based decision making. Tye (1992) stated that three management concepts borrowed from the business world dominate American education and direct administrative behavior. They are: hierarchy, accountability, and the notion of schools as composed of interchangeable parts. Changing this orientation may be a difficult task. Since administrative training programs have not emphasized the development of such skills as leadership, communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, and group decision making and goal setting, Tye believes administrators will need to be ***retrained***. He stated that: "This a major priority for the restructuring movement, and without such retraining the movement will most likely fail" (p. 14).

Throughout the United States, and since 1992 in the State of Texas, communities are demanding a greater role in local school governance. If schools are to become more responsive to the communities they serve, then administrators must develop a better understanding of the politics of local school governance and its relationship to the dynamics of the community.

THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

During the more recent past, scarce federal resources, lack of public confidence in the schools, a barrage of reports rationalizing excellence, and a new lexicon of "quick fixes," such as site-based decision making, public choice, teacher empowerment, and "teacher-proof" curricula, have turned our attention to the classroom and to politics in and around schools (Marshall & Scribner, 1991, p. 349). Lawrence Iannaccone (1975), one of the founders of a special interest group in the politics of education, coined the phrase, the micropolitics of education. He described it as the politics that takes place in and around schools. Thus, site-based decision making must be examined as both a macro- and micropolitical phenomenon. In their text on governing American schools, Campbell, et al. (1983) stated: "Educational policy making at all levels is immersed in politics and by definition ***educational policy making is political action***" (p. 404).

Bailey (1962) concluded that education is one of the most thoroughly political enterprises in American life, despite the educational myth that politics and education are separated. The apolitical myth, Lutz and Iannoccone (1962) stated, is based in part on a narrow definition of politics, a parochial view of education, and the serviceability of the myth to educators and politicians. Lutz and Merz (1992) contend that the relationship of schools to their community is nominally established by the ***political processes*** of government. In most school districts in the United States the community elects a board of education that in turn establishes policy and hires administrators to execute that policy.

To develop a framework for understanding the relationship of site-based decision making to the politics of school governance, the three dominant theories of local school politics should be examined. Ziegler and Jennings (1974) analyzed the governance of local public education and suggested that the essence of democracy is that citizens participate in governance decisions. Zeigler and Jennings relied on a competition theory of democratic politics to guide their research questions or methods. Their central assumptions are a mix of normative and scientific political theory. Its scientific aspect is a variant of group interest theory, while its normative premises express a belief in maximum egalitarian participation. The combination of interest group theory assumptions and normative premises about broad participation leads to the essential criterion position that democracy requires the regular, continuous political ***competition and***

opposition among a wide range of informed groups with diverse interests in policy decisions (Lutz & Iannoccone, 1978, p. 126).

Based on massive data and extensive analysis, Zeigler and Jennings noted that only small percentages of the American people ***participate*** in the most accessible decision making opportunity available, e.g. decisions about who is elected to the school board, and that there are very few decisions in which citizens participate at all. They cited devices such as at-large, nonpartisan elections which minimize the link between public preferences, group demands, and elected and appointed officials. As the result of infrequent competition and rare incumbent board member defeat, Zeigler and Jennings concluded that school boards are elected by a ***special class of citizens*** who participate in the elections. They see the board's true function as legitimizing policies of the school's professional elite to the community rather than injecting community interests into these. Although this class does not necessarily represent a social elite, they are selected by their choice of affiliations and activities. Thus, boards tend to represent the civic leadership segment of the community who elected them rather than the community at large. Low voter turnout, frequent reelection of board incumbents, and episodic rather than continuous political conflict are viewed as evidence of structural, ideological, and political resource limitations upon an open interplay of competitive interests.

Based on the participation criteria, Zeigler and Jennings conclude that participation in local school governance is available only to people with a sophisticated knowledge of the political process, and that schools are therefore political but not democratic, and represent a powerful community elite. Thus, Zeigler and Jennings reported that our present school district governments are fundamentally and perhaps ***unredeemably undemocratic***, because "... school boards are likely to become spokesmen for the superintendent to the community; their representational roles are reversed, and the superintendent becomes the dominant policy maker" (p. 92), leading Zeigler and Jennings to conclude that local school boards ***"should govern or be abolished"*** (p. 254).

Other researchers have sought to explain local school district politics by the delivery of its public service, its other government function, as their focus rather than its conflict resolution function. In contrast to the Continuous Participation Theory of Zeigler and Jennings, the Input-Output Systems Theory of Wirt and Kirst (1982) uses the relationship between the school system's response to either citizen demands or client needs as its point of departure. Wirt and Kirst took a somewhat different view concerning the true measure of democratic governance. Agreeing with Zeigler and Jennings that participation in a democracy is important, they differed however, in their belief that the real measure of democracy is the degree to which the ***people are able to get what they demand***.

Based on the political theory of Easton (*A Framework for Political Analysis*, 1965), Wirt and Kirst analyzed school governance from a systems perspective. Easton's model is the heuristic device used especially by Wirt to shape the presentation of much politics of education research. They suggested that the community provides resources and makes demands on the schools (called inputs), and that the board converts these inputs into policy decisions and programs (called outputs). The demands are often caused by stress or conflict in a subsystem, such as a special-interest group.

The capacity of an inactive community to be aroused and mobilized to place demands on the local school governance system was of interest to Wirt and Kirst. They compared school board elections to the arroyos of the Southwest, which are usually dry but during times of flash flooding can become raging, uncontrollable torrents. Although Wirt and Kirst are struck by the dimension of political turbulence relating to resource allocation, curriculum, and other school decisions, they are equally impressed by the lack

of participation in school board elections. Because of this lack of participation, coupled with the ***lack of school board policy responsiveness*** to citizens' demands, Wirt and Kirst also concluded that local school governance was relatively undemocratic.

From the perspective of Lutz and Iannoccone's Dissatisfaction Theory (1978), neither Continuous Participation nor Input-Output theorists offer a complete understanding of the local school district as a democratic governmental unit. The political myth of continuous participation, they assert, has always stood in the way of understanding how democratic societies work. They cited Barker's *Reflections on Government* (1942) statement that ***the essential feature of a free people is freedom, not involvement***. Further more Lutz and Iannoccone assert that the delivery of services people want, or which are best for them, may be the fruit of benevolent despotism as much as of any other political system.

The Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy proposes a model in which a stable community elects a representative board whose values are congruent with those of the community. This board then selects a superintendent with congruent values, who administers board and administrative policy which reflects the values of the community. According to this theory, as the ***norms and values*** of the community change, a discrepancy may develop between community values and board values. Lutz and Iannoccone described this phenomenon as Michel's (1966) "Iron Law of Oligarchy," where there is an inevitable drift toward an organized central elite in all political systems with a tendency of that elite to perpetuate itself. As a result, political systems become increasingly ***closed to citizens' demands*** over time. As the discrepancy becomes intolerable, the community resorts to political action, removing board members through the electoral process until the values of the board and the values of the community are once again congruent. In order to operationalize these new values with those of the community, the incumbent superintendent must be replaced with one whose values are consistent with those of the new board and community. The new administration then enacts new policies and programs, and school/community stability is restored. Therefore, Dissatisfaction Theory identifies democratic control with ***episodic adjustment*** of school district policy to the will or values of the larger community, rather than any minimum level of participation or correlation between citizen demands and administrative policy decisions (Lutz & Iannoccone, 1978, p. 130).

The three political theories of how democracy operates, or fails to operate, in American local school governance describes what is perhaps the single most critical task for American public education - to provide an American political system of democracy. Thus, the question of whether local school governance is democratic or not becomes a very important question in the American political process.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & FINDINGS

The research design of this study employed the Delphi method to determine the future impact of site-based decision making on local school governance in the State of Texas. The technique is one where forecasts made by professionals or qualified individuals in the field under study are shared and organized in order to make predictions or decisions about the future. Developed by the Rand Corporation in the 1950s, the technique has been successfully adapted to educational problems and used to form consensus opinions regarding probable future outcomes (Binning, Cochran & Donatelli, 1972, p.6). In order to focus responses on the politics of site-based decision making in Texas public schools and to facilitate reasonable responses, a literature-based Delphi instrument was developed. The Delphi instrument used a Lickert Scale to measure responses as follows: 5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = No Opinion; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree.

The sampling method devised for the study was to form two panels of experts comprised of the following: 1) board presidents, superintendents, and principals; and 2) parents and community/business members. The panelists were randomly selected from each of the nine Texas Education Agency average daily attendance groupings, except the largest ADA group (Over 50,000) in which all six districts were selected.

Data for the study collected through the Delphi technique used the median to rank responses, and the interquartile range to measure the degree of consensus reached by panelists. The closer the median is to five on the Lickert scale, the greater the degree of importance placed on the statement by panelists. The interquartile range contains the middle fifty-percent of the responses; thus, the smaller the IQR, the greater the degree of consensus and vice versa.

Numerical values of 1 to 5 were assigned by the panel members on the strongly agree-strongly disagree Lickert scales on both the Delphi instrument and the Ancillary Analysis instrument. The median and interquartile range from each of the three rounds of the Delphi were analyzed to determine the degree of consensus reached by panelists. In Rounds Two and Three of the Delphi, panelists were provided feedback in the form of individual panel's median responses and interquartile ranges, along with group median responses and interquartile ranges. In Round Three, panelists were asked to justify their responses that fell outside the interquartile range for each item on the Delphi instrument.

The three rounds of the Delphi study were conducted from August, 1992 to December, 1993. Sixty-six panelists responded to the Round One instrument. Panel One was composed of the following respondents:

Board Members	=	8
Superintendents	=	15
Principals	=	18
	N =	41

Panel Two was composed of the following respondents:

Parents	=	12
Community/ Business Members	=	13
	N =	25

In Round Two, fifty-five panelists responded, representing eighty-three percent of the total number of panelists who responded in Round One. Panel One was composed of the following respondents:

Board Members	=	5
Superintendents	=	15
Principals	=	14
	N =	34

Panel Two was composed of the following respondents:

Parents	=	11
Community/Business Members	=	10
	N =	21

In Round Three, fifty panelists responded, representing seventy-six percent of the total number of panelists who responded in Round One. Panel One was composed of the following respondents:

Board Members	=	5
Superintendents	=	13
Principals	=	12
	N =	30

Panel Two was composed of the following respondents:

Parents	=	10
Community/Business Members	=	10
	N =	20

Thus, the minimum participation level of twenty per panel, and seventy-percent response rate was reached in all three rounds of the Delphi. Panelist response by ADA grouping for each round was as follows:

ADA GROUPING	NUMBER OF PANELISTS BY ROLE					TOTAL
			ROUND ONE			
	B	S	PR	PA	C/B	
Over 50,000	2	2	2	2	2	10
25,000 to 49,999	0	1	2	0	0	3
10,000 to 24,999	2	2	3	3	3	13
5,000 to 9,999	1	1	3	2	3	10
3,000 to 4,999	0	2	3	2	1	8
1,600 to 2,999	1	1	1	1	2	6
1,000 to 1,599	1	3	2	1	1	8
500 to 999	0	2	2	1	1	7
Under 500	0	1	0	0	0	1
					N =	66
			ROUND TWO			
Over 50,000	1	2	2	2	2	9
25,000 to 49,999	0	1	1	0	0	2
10,000 to 24,999	2	2	2	2	2	10
5,000 to 9,999	0	1	3	2	2	8
3,000 to 4,999	0	2	2	2	0	6
1,600 to 2,999	1	1	1	1	2	6
1,000 to 1,599	1	3	2	1	1	8
500 to 999	0	2	1	1	1	5
Under 500	0	1	0	0	0	1
					N =	55

ROUND THREE

	B	S	PR	PA	C/B		
Over 50,000	1	1	2	2	2		8
25,000 to 49,999	0	1	1	0	0		2
10,000 to 24,999	2	2	2	2	2		10
5,000 to 9,999	0	1	2	2	2		7
3,000 to 4,999	0	2	2	1	0		5
1,600 to 2,999	1	1	1	1	2		6
1,000 to 1,599	1	3	1	1	1		7
500 to 999	0	2	1	1	1		5
Under 500	0	0	0	0	0		0
						N =	50

B = Board Member; **S** = Superintendent; **PR** = Principal
PA = Parent; **C/B** = Community/Business Member

An Ancillary Analysis instrument was developed from the three basic research questions and nine sub-questions posed to answer the problem addressed by the study: the politics of site-based decision making in Texas public school districts, and to validate the data gathered through the Delphi method. The Ancillary Analysis used the same Lickert scale format as the Delphi instrument. A total of two-hundred eighty-four instruments were mailed to the executive committees of professional organizations whose membership closely corresponded with the composition of the Delphi panels. This research was conducted from February, 1993 to May, 1993.

In the Ancillary Analysis study, two-hundred fifteen responses were received, representing a return rate of seventy-six percent. Responses to the Ancillary Analysis instrument by executive committee members were as follows:

East Texas School Study Council	=	75
Texas Association of Secondary Principals	=	31
Texas Association of School Boards	=	24
Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association	=	24
Texas State Teachers Association	=	22
Texas Association of School Administrators	=	20
Texas Parent-Teacher Association	=	19
N	=	215

Using both Guttman and Spearman-Brown split-half reliability analyses, the data from the Ancillary Analysis instrument were factor-analyzed, resulting in the emergence of three factors, or groups of statements. The factors were then tested for analysis of variance, by the Scheffe test with significance at the .05 level. The factors were then examined through analysis of variance both between groups and across factors to determine areas of significant difference, and were tested using Tukey's post hoc analysis with significance at the .05 level.

The following findings resulted from the Delphi study related to the research questions:

Research Question One: Will site-based decision making produce more citizen participation in the process of local school governance?

The panelists agreed that site-based decision making will:
1) lead to increased board responsiveness to citizen demands;
2) increase interaction between board members and constituents;
3) lead to a greater number of citizens participating in the day-to-day process of educational decision making; and
4) increase the number of decisions participated in by citizens.

The panelists disagreed that site-based decision making will result in less disagreement with local school district policy. So, site-based decision making will, in a quantitative sense, provide a structure for increased participation and decision making, but ***conflict will inevitably occur*** as a result of previously disenfranchised groups becoming politically empowered. Especially in those urban areas characterized by demographic diversity, many parents, community members, and business persons want school board members who will represent their special interests and articulate them through board policy. An alternative future for site-based decision making and participation in Texas public schools would be created by local school boards using the site-based decision making process ***to facilitate community consensus*** about what kind of change is needed in local school governance, and how that change can be accomplished.

Research Question Two: Will citizen demands produce more responsive policies and programs due to site-based decision making?

The panelists agreed that site-based decision making will:
1) create competing demands among various school constituencies;
2) result in increased influence of interest group demands on educational policy outputs; and
3) increase the congruency between citizen demands and local school district policies.

The panelists disagreed that site-based decision making will alter the traditional class bias (middle and business) of board membership. So, although site-based decision making will create increased competition among educational stakeholders to influence board policy output, ***congruency between demands and policy output will increase*** even though the traditional middle and business class bias of board membership will not be affected as a result of site-based decision making. An alternative future for site-based decision making and outputs in Texas public schools would be created by the ***state formalizing site-based decision making committees as part of the local school governance structure***, thereby strengthening the link between the school district, community members, other governmental entities, and social service agencies, thus creating an integrated service delivery system for local school districts.

Research Question Three: Will citizen dissatisfaction with public education be reduced due to site-based decision making?

The panelists agreed that site-based decision making will:
1) result in adjustment of school district policy linked to the will or values of the larger community;
2) cause school board members to view themselves more in the image of being representatives of the people who elect them;
3) serve to reflect changes in community values, aspirations, and expectations;

4) allow people to participate in meaningful ways in educational decision making, thus decreasing their dissatisfaction.

The panelists disagreed that site-based decision making will:

1) result in an inevitable drift toward an organized central policymaking elite which will have a tendency to perpetuate itself;

2) result in fewer challenges to incumbents in school board elections;

3) result in fewer defeats of incumbents in school board elections;

4) increase the frequency of involuntary superintendent turnover; and

5) make boards and superintendents vulnerable to electoral defeat and dismissal because of a wave of political dissatisfaction with educational governance.

The panelists also disagreed that site-based decision making is the result of a wave of political dissatisfaction with educational governance, making boards and superintendents vulnerable to electoral defeat and dismissal. So, site-based decision making will not bring a halt to the cycle of citizen dissatisfaction, incumbent board member defeat, involuntary superintendent turnover, and local education governance realignment. An alternative future for site-based decision making and dissatisfaction in Texas public schools would be created by the development of a ***Cogovernance Model*** to structurally operationalize the participation of parents and community members in local education governance. All public school districts in Texas are required by legislation, to involve professional staff along with parents and community members in establishing and reviewing their district's educational goals, objectives, and major districtwide classroom instructional initiatives; so the statutory provision for two-thirds majority representation of teaching personnel on site-based decision making committees could be revised to provide a two-thirds majority representation of parents and community members, who could be elected at-large or in a manner reflective of the individual campus' demographic characteristics, at the same time board members are elected. In this way, site-based decision making and school board policy making could be integrated in the Cogovernance Model, which would bring parents, community members, other government and social service officials into the educational accountability arena.

In relation to the effectiveness of site-based decision making in decentralizing decision making in the five domains mandated in Texas, the panelists identified Goal Setting, Staffing, and School Organization as being most effective. Budgeting and Curriculum were identified by the panelists as the two decision making domains least effective in decentralizing decision making. Similarly, panelists identified these same decision making domains as those with the greatest and least decision making authority delegated to the site-based decision making committees in their districts.

The following findings resulted from the Ancillary Analysis study related to the three basic research questions and nine sub-questions:

Research Question One: Will site-based decision making produce more citizen participation in the process of local school governance?

Respondents agreed that site-based decision making will result in more citizen participation in local school governance.

Research Question Two: Will citizen demands produce more responsive policies and programs due to site-based decision making?

Respondents agreed that school policies and programs will be more responsive to citizen's demands as a result of site-based decision making.

Research Question Three: Will citizen dissatisfaction with public education be reduced due to site-based decision making?

Respondents agreed that site-based decision making will decrease citizen dissatisfaction with public schools.

Sub-Question One: Will more people participate in the process of local school governance?

Respondents agreed that more people will participate in local school governance as a result of site-based decision making.

Sub-Question Two: Will people participate more often in the process of local school governance?

Respondents agreed that people will participate in local school governance more often as a result of site-based decision making.

Sub-Question Three: Will people participate in more important decisions?

Respondents agreed that citizens will participate in important school governance decisions as a result of site-based decision making.

Sub-Question Four: Will people vote more often in school elections?

Respondents disagreed that voters will vote more often in school elections as a result of site-based decision making.

Sub-Question Five: Will citizens perceive that their specific demands are being met?

Respondents agreed that citizens will perceive their demands are being met as a result of site-based decision making.

Sub-Question Six: Will an objective analysis of demands versus actual policies and programs suggest greater political responsiveness?

Respondents agreed that citizen demands and school policy will be more congruent as a result of site-based decision making.

Sub-Question Seven: Will the percentage of voter turnout in school elections change?

Respondents disagreed that more voters will turn out to vote in school elections as a result of site-based decision making.

Sub-Question Eight: Will incumbent school board member defeat decrease?

Respondents agreed that fewer incumbent school board members will be defeated in school board elections as a result of site-based decision making.

Sub-Question Nine: Will superintendent turnover decrease?

Respondents agreed that there will be less involuntary superintendent turnover in Texas public schools as a result of site-based decision making.

CONCLUSIONS

Researchers can predict a likely future for the political effects of site-based decision making on local school governance in Texas public schools by examining the attitudes and beliefs of the school board

members, superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, and community/business members reported in this study.

Site-based decision making appears to be perceived as a more accessible governance mechanism, offering ***increased opportunity*** for participation at the school site, rather than at the district governance (board and superintendent) level. Site-based decision making will continue to provide an opportunity for lay involvement in educational policymaking in Texas public schools, with the results being decentralized decision making in areas specifically defined in each school district's site-based decision making plan. In particular, the ***Goal Setting, Staffing, and School Organization*** decision making domains will offer school constituents the greatest opportunity for influencing the substantive aspects of educational policy formulation.

Site-based decision making appears to be perceived not only as a more accessible governance mechanism but also as a vehicle for ***articulating demands*** to educational policymakers. Site-based decision making will never be given legal authority, and thus will continue to be ***primarily advisory*** in nature, with the policy dominance of the educational oligarchy continuing. Despite the absence of legal authority, the members of site-based decision making committees will become part of this ***school-site oligarchy***, resulting in greater congruence between citizen demands and educational policy output, and in the final analysis, greater democratization of local school governance. Site-based decision making appears to be perceived as reducing dissatisfaction with public education in general; however, the answers to the research questions regarding changes in voter turnout, incumbent school board member defeat, and involuntary superintendent turnover are less discernible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Site-based decision making in Texas public schools is a political phenomenon, created by legislation at the statehouse in Austin. It offers school districts a structure for involving stakeholders in the educational decision making process. However, the results of this study suggest that school districts should be prepared to encounter ***challenge, conflict, and change*** resulting from the implementation of site-based decision making. It is recommended that school districts in general, and board members and administrators in particular, develop the leadership, communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, goal setting, and consensus-building skills necessary to accompany the fundamental changes that site-based decision making will bring to their organization. It is further recommended that administrative preparation programs adopt this skill training as an integral component of their program.

As the education milieu becomes increasingly ***politicized*** by processes and structures such as site-based decision making, the need for board members, superintendents, and administrators to expand their knowledge and expertise in this area increases commensurately. Specifically, the Dissatisfaction Theory, which posits and explanatory relationship between the board, community, and superintendent, should be used as an analytical tool in relation to the current political, economic, and demographic status of the district and the implementation of site-based decision making in their school system.

It is generally assumed that "with the pursestrings come the power," and the data presented in this study tend to support this contention, since Budgeting and Curriculum were identified as the two decision making domains where the greatest authority was centralized, and the least authority was delegated to site-based decision making committees in local school districts. In itself, this appears to be an anomaly, since

two of the three domains identified as having the greatest authority delegated, i.e. Goal Setting and Staffing, carry with them strong implications for resource allocation. It is recommended that boards and superintendents take affirmative action to involve site-based decision making committees in the budgeting and curriculum process, especially in light of the substantial portion of public school funding in the state derived from local property tax revenue. Unless boards and superintendents move beyond rhetoric and take action to devolve decision making to site-based decision making committees, their effectiveness as educational leaders and policymakers will be diminished.

With the increased emphasis on accountability for results in Texas public schools, and the advent of the Academic Excellence Indicator System, it remains incumbent upon school districts to develop and maintain an ***effective community relations program***. It is recommended that boards and superintendents establish a community relations program that enables the communication necessary for aligning the values of the school with those of the community. School districts must go beyond merely conducting a unilateral, glossy public relations campaign to "sell" the district to its constituency (although this is certainly an important component in effective communication), and develop a program that will facilitate open, two-way communication, allowing the schools to respond to community demands, and allowing the community to understand and participate in its schools. After all, the purpose of an effective community relations program is in part, preventing extended dissatisfaction. While it may not be necessary to meet the demands of every citizen group both active and potential, it is necessary to prevent things from becoming disruptive to the normal educational process. Thus, school districts must communicate to the community how the policies and programs of the district reflect community values and beliefs.

Finally, it is recommended that boards and superintendents analyze their own ***board-superintendent culture and decision making behavior*** in relation to the characteristics of their community. When there are different values in the community, the board should not only understand that fact and recognize the right of those groups to hold different values, but openly discuss the alternative policies that emanate from those differing values. Boards can still act in an ***elite council*** manner when consensus clearly exists, for expeditiousness when considering certain routine action items on the board meeting agenda, while behaving in an ***arena council*** manner when considering the discussion items on the agenda. The superintendent should participate in policy discussions with the board, but should refrain from declaring one value correct. Decisions should be made after public debate and discussion and should be made publicly so there is no hint of "cutting deals" to obtain consensus, thus giving site-based decision making committees the impression that their participation in educational policymaking is token.

Superintendents, and most especially school boards, must be willing to recognize that along with creating a positive vision of the future for their school district, comes the need to provide ***politically risk-taking leadership*** for the district. Site-based decision making represents one way for superintendents and school boards to provide this risk-taking leadership. As Danzberger, Kirst, and Usdan (1992) stated:

> ...the trend in education governance is to broaden the base of lay involvement, with more and more influence being exercised by those outside the established educational community (governors, parents, legislators, civic leaders, business elites). These new circumstances present school board members with a unique opportunity to ***demonstrate their leadership by brokering the involvement of these powerful new lay forces in school affairs*** (p. 1).

> The school board is a crucial player in efforts to reform American education. Its role in the 1983-1988 state reforms was responsive, but these reforms mostly intensified the existing system rather than restructure it. Restructuring requires ***bold, risk-taking school board leadership and coherent local policymaking*** - rare among school boards to date. State initiatives do not necessarily lead to a commensurate loss in local control. There is room for school boards to capitalize on state reforms to expand their own influence and leadership - if they undertake aggressive policymaking and leadership for education reform with their communities (p. 35).

For the immediate future, site-based decision making is the most viable governance model to involve a "broad spectrum of stakeholders" and bring about what should be the ultimate objective of any school reform measure: ***improved student achievement***.

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